


# Oak Park, Galewood residents weigh in on North Avenue redevelopment plans

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Rachel K. Hindery

 Cindy Cambray, an associate outreach planner for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP, estimates more than 75 people attended a public visioning workshop on Nov. 15 to learn about North Avenue redevelopment plans in [Oak Park](#) and the Galewood neighborhood in Chicago.

The workshop continued a pattern of community investment that began with a grant application to CMAP's local technical assistance program in June 2017, and will continue into 2019.

North Avenue plan development is co-sponsored by Alderman Chris Taliaferro and Oak Park Mayor Anan Abu-Taleb, according to a CMAP webpage.

Cambray said redevelopment focuses on North Avenue between Harlem Avenue and Austin Boulevard, and a half-mile north and south between these points.

Workshop attendees used keypads to vote on what they'd like to see from redevelopment, adding more detail to survey results. For example, survey respondents indicated they would like more restaurants along North Avenue, with keypad voters saying they preferred casual-dining restaurants.

The redevelopment plan has an 18-month timeline.

"We want to work on this plan with you and make sure the community is involved in the entire process," Cambray said.

More than a dozen people at the workshop also shared questions and comments.

Existing businesses will be supported, officials said.

"A lot of the businesses we talked to have been on the corridor for decades," Cambray said, adding that these businesses expressed a desire to stay on North Avenue.

Transportation and making North Avenue more pedestrian-friendly are also key areas of focus. The biggest concern is safely crossing North Avenue, and adding median islands received support during keypad voting.

"We can't just revitalize the area," Cambray said. "We also want to make sure that it's safe for pedestrians and traffic."

Galewood resident Erin Fallis attended the Nov. 15 workshop after taking the survey and telling others about it.

"Being invested in your community is really important to me — knowing about the changes in the community and wanting to be involved and seeing my fellow community members," Fallis said, adding that she's looking forward to "different, exciting businesses in the area" and also is excited about transportation improvements that were discussed at the workshop.

"I'm very glad to see folks represented from both the Galewood and the Oak Park side," Cambray said, sharing some of the highlights from a survey of local residents, visitors to North Avenue and businesses.

Cambray added that the 2,100 people who took surveys broke the previous record for surveys in a CMAP study area by more than 600 respondents.

"That speaks a lot to you all that are here tonight, that you're very involved in your community," Cambray said.

Judith Alexander, chair of The North Avenue District, or T-NAD, agreed.

"Their interest and support will help us implement recommendations and revitalize North Avenue from Austin to Harlem," Alexander said.

Alexander worked on the successful grant application.

Brenda Rancher-McGruder, a coordinating planner with the department of transportation, also noticed the strong community participation.

"We like to get the public involved because we want to show we're invested in their concerns," Rancher-McGruder said, adding, "This is a very good turnout, and it's been a very supportive and active community."

In December, a "panel of experts in the field of economic development" will meet, Cambray said. Part of the two-day technical assistance panel will be open to the public.

"One of the best things about the CMAP technical assistance program is the opportunity to work with the urban land institute panel," Alexander said. "This is a panel of real estate professionals assembled to address our specific issues."

The transportation subcommittee will also meet in the next few months. A second public meeting is tentatively scheduled for April.

This will be a chance to review "draft recommendations; more concrete findings," Rancher-McGruder said.

A strategic action plan meeting is tentatively scheduled for May.

McGruder said that both businesses and residents will be involved in transportation discussions to discover "where there are commonalities and differences" and to "address everyone's perspective."

More information is available at [www.cmap.illinois.gov](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov).

***Rachel K. Hindery is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.***